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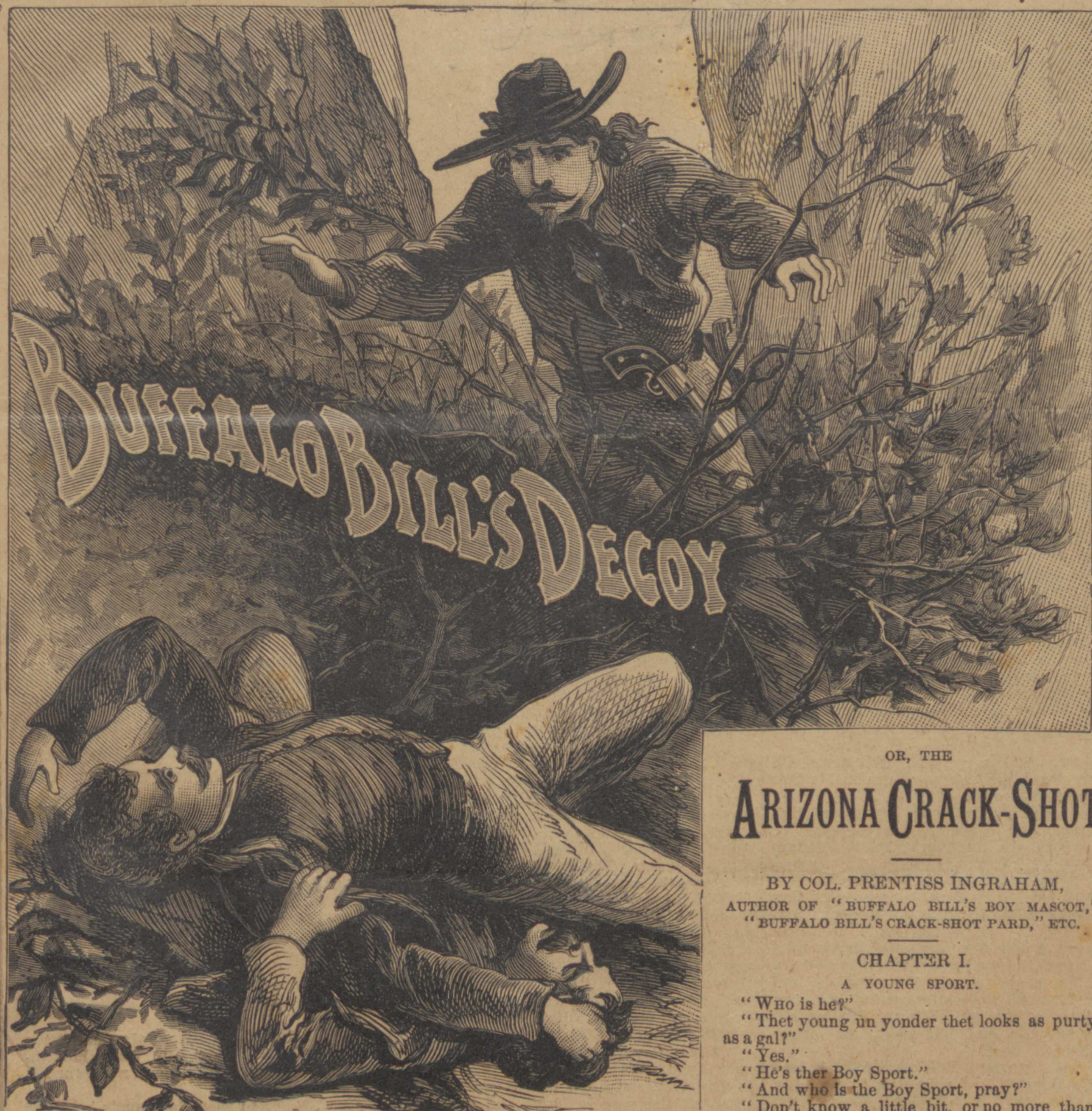
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OR, THE

ARIZONA CRACK-SHOT

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S BOY MASCOT,"
"BUFFALO BILL'S CRACK-SHOT PARD," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG SPORT.

"Who is he?"

"Thet young un yonder thet looks as purty
as a gal?"

"Yes."

"He's ther Boy Sport."

"And who is the Boy Sport, pray?"

"Don't know a little bit, or no more than
he's a all 'round good fellow."

FELL UPON THE BODY OF HIS FOE JUST AS BUFFALO BILL CAME UPON THE SCENE.

"Where did he come from?"
 "Don't know."
 "What's his name?"
 "Don't know."
 "What does he do?"
 "Gambles a leetle, rides about a heap, shoots game, and has kilt a couple o' men since he has been in Devil's Canyon, while he rakes in ther dust of all them as is fool enough to play with him at keerds."
 "He's a dandy."
 "That's what he be."
 "I'd like to get acquainted with him, Bunco."
 "Thet's jist what that big feller thar' is goin' ter git, or I don't know myself, for that boy is gittin' ready ter use his gun, if I knows signs when I sees 'em."
 "I half believe you are right, for the man seems to be looking for trouble with the boy."
 "He'll git it, never fear."
 "Who is the man?"
 "One o' ther worst men in Devil's Canyon, and they do say he belongs to ther band of Silent Slayers."
 "Who are they?"
 "Don't know; only there is a band o' killers about here thet takes a man's life every now and then in a secret way, and a number has handed in their chips in that way."
 "But nobody knows 'em, only when a man don't do to please 'em he are found dead in his cabin or on ther trail somewhere leadin' to his mine, and a knife is diskivered a stickin' in his ribs, fer thet is their way, whoever they be, and thet's why they is called ther Silent Slayers. See?"
 "Yes, I see, and this camp of Devil's Canyon appears to be a very tough place."
 "Tough is a tender name for it, pard, for it are ther worst community on earth as dwells here, as you'll find out."
 "And yet I find that boy here, for he is nothing more than a youth, with a face as handsome and gentle as a woman's."
 "Well, he k'n rough it with the toughest of 'em, when they riles him."
 "Does he seek trouble?"
 "You bet he don't. He kinder tries ter slip away from it, until they pushes him too hard, and then he jumps in with both feet."
 "I tell, yer, pard Bill, he are a queer one—thet queer thet I can't make him out, for he's as gentle as a sister in caring for ther sick, nursin' 'em so kind-like, and yet I has seen him dress a awful-looking wound for a man that was knifed, and another as was shot, and never flinch no more than a doctor would; but look at him now, as he's playing keerds, thar', with Red Sam, and you'll see that, though he's takin' ther man's bluster talk mighty cool-like, he hes quietly loosened one of the revolvers in his belt."
 "Why, he is a perfect walking arsenal, Bunco, for I see two revolvers in his belt and three knives."
 "Yas, Bill, he carries six bowies and two revolvers, not to speak of a derringer or two whar' a Chinaman carries a trump keerd—up his sleeve."
 "I tell you, he knows how ter use 'em all, too, fer he gave a exhibition one day jist fer fun, of drawing his weapons and using 'em, fer some one stuck up a tin plate on a tree fer him, and firing with both hands, he put twelve revolver shots in it at ten paces, two derringer bullets, and stuck them six knives he carries in it, too, by throwing 'em, and all in the time of just thirty seconds, and that meant ther drawing time, ter boot!"
 "I tell yer, pard Bill, ther folks 'round Devil's Canyon hev' respected him mighty since then, and I does believe he done what he did jist ter let 'em see what he c'u'd do,

so they wouldn't crowd him too much, bein' he were a boy—now look thar'!"
 "Yes, that man you called Red Sam seems trying to force him into a quarrel."
 "He does, and I guess will do so."
 "Well, I won't see the boy imposed on by a great overgrown bully like that, and who has his pals with him."
 "Don't you chip in, pard Bill, for I tells you ther boy kin take keer of himself—didn't I tell yer so?"
 The boy had suddenly risen from his seat and faced his partner, while a revolver, quickly drawn, covered him.
 "Red Sam, you are robbing me!" he cried.

CHAPTER II. IN DEVIL'S CANYON.

My story opens in Arizona in a camp on the line of survey for a railroad into California from New Mexico, and in a locality where, ages ago, lived the Cliff Dwellers, and later the half-Indian, half-Mexican people, who were content to be what they were—nominally cattle raisers, yet, in reality, little better than outlaws.
 Devil's Canyon was in the midst of a country well watered, wooded and where grass grew plentifully, and a number of rancheros were scattered about that vicinity.
 Then, too, it had become a camp for overland freighters, while gold had been found in the mountains near, where a number of miners had therefore made it their abiding place.
 Devil's Canyon was on the direct line of survey across Arizona, and thither had congregated several hundred of as rough a sample of humanity as could be found anywhere, for one-fourth of them were desperadoes, another fourth gamblers, living wholly by cards, and the balance were not much better.
 The two men who had been discussing about the youth who had made Devil's Canyon his abiding place were not to be classed with the rest of the community, for one was none other than Buffalo Bill, a man who was not to be found in such a place as that wild camp unless duty demanded his presence there.
 He had arrived in the camp at sunset, had found a place to put up, in what was called Wide Awake Inn, and kept by a man known as Brad Burns, whatever his real name might be, and who was also proprietor of the Sports' Delight saloon next door, which was never closed, day or night or Sundays.
 Buffalo Bill had gone to Devil's Canyon for a purpose, as will be told hereafter, and the first man he met was an old pard, who had served under him as a scout—had struck a gold find in his wanderings one day, picked up a bagful of the precious metal, and disappeared.
 The next heard of him was that he had gone East, but having been buncoed out of all his money, he had to return to the far West, though not to his old haunts, as he was ashamed to face his former pards.
 And at Devil's Canyon Buffalo Bill had found him, calling himself Bunco, as a reminder of his folly, and engaged in no other work than prospecting for another find of gold, with the firm belief that he would strike it rich again before he died, and yet live like a gentleman once more, for he had been well born, well reared, met with ill success, and had sought his fortune in the West as so many others have done and will continue to do.
 Once he had said to Buffalo Bill with not a hint of dialect in his words:
 "Some day I hope to be a gentleman again, pard Cody, but as long as I am out in this wild land I am what I am, and the same as the rest in looks and conversation."

And the man with a college education, courtly manners, fine form and handsome face, still young, and with life before him, appeared on a par with those about him, only not a crime ever had been laid at his door, and with his comrades he had been a manly fellow, true as steel, brave and liked by all who knew him. Only his intimates knew that he was acting a part, and they wondered what cloud hung over his life, what mystery there was about him.
 The young sport whom the two old friends were speaking of, and observing so closely, sat at a table in Sports' Delight saloon, playing cards with three men, who were as hard-looking characters as could be found even in Devil's Canyon.
 The four were playing partners, Red Sam and the boy sport against the other two, and they were the losers, too, in the games thus far played, the other couple having piled up big winnings on the table by each man.
 Somehow the losses of Red Sam and the young sport were all laid at the latter's door by his big partner, who now and then uttered some savage words against him, calling him names and asking him bluntly if he was in league with the others to get his money.
 The youth took it all quietly, though there was a dangerous gleam in his eye.
 That he did not resent the words of Red Sam no one wondered at, for the latter was known as one of the most dangerous men in Devil's Canyon—a bully and desperado, who seemed to enjoy taking human life, for he was always looking for trouble until he had become a terror even in that wild gathering of roughs and bad men.
 Large, raw-boned, ugly-faced, strong as a mountain lion, quick as a wildcat, with a voice of thunder and a record as a man-killer, Red Sam deserved his name from his deeds as well as from his long red hair and beard.
 The young sport was as totally his opposite as it was possible to be. Slight in form, but splendidly built, with thick, jet-black, wavy hair, a face darkly bronzed, but perfectly featured, strong, determined, handsome, yet gentle as a woman, and with a low, strangely musical voice, he seemed like one to cower in terror before the man who was his partner in that game of cards.
 His slouch hat sat jauntily upon his fine head; his blue woolen shirt, black silk scarf, gray corduroy pants, stuck in top boots, his weapons, even, were all of the finest material and make—that was his make-up.
 But boy that he seemed, not yet eighteen, Buffalo Bill thought, he seemed vastly out of place herding with the hard crowd of Devil's Canyon.

CHAPTER III. FIVE REVOLVERS LEVELED.

Buffalo Bill and Bunco had been seated at a table apart from the others in the Sports' Delight saloon, but they could see the young sport distinctly, and heard above the murmur of voices, for there were half a hundred men in the place, the bold words which he had uttered.
 They saw his lightning-like act in drawing his revolver, and noted how quickly he had risen to his feet and covered his man before he uttered the bold words:
 "You are robbing me, Red Sam."
 The big bully was caught off his guard for once.
 He had roared out his words against the young sport from time to time, had insulted him openly, and had not heard a word in resentment.
 Those who had seen the sport's behavior upon other occasions wondered at his si-

lence, and supposed that Red Sam had cowed him.

But the boy had played calmly on, watching every play like a hawk, and Bunco had said:

"Yer'll hear su'thin' drap suddenly afore long, pard Bill."

Buffalo Bill had been watching the boy's face.

It was pale, perhaps, but serene, and the burning light in the fine eyes alone showed that he felt what the bully was saying.

But suddenly had come the burst of indignation, the covering of the man with the revolver, and the charge that he was being robbed.

Red Sam knew enough of the hand that held that revolver not to make any effort to grasp his own.

He was covered, and the youth was known to be a dead shot.

There was not the slightest tremor in the hand that leveled the weapon, either.

For once Red Sam was willing to temporize.

At least until he could get the upper hand or triumph by treachery.

So he said, and his voice was no longer a roar:

"Yer accuses me, young sport, because I knows you was playin' ag'in' me, ye'r pard, in this game."

"It is a lie!"

"You are secretly the partner of these two men to rob me, for you are their friend, not mine. You asked me to play with you to make up a game, and said we could win big money."

"I watched you clear through, and you played into their hands to rob me."

"You played against me, and the three of you have robbed me of three hundred dollars, and you shall give it back to me, Red Sam."

"Come, I mean business, and your life isn't worth a cent if you refuse to do what I say."

Now the boy's voice rang through the large cabin, and every man was upon his feet.

Other games ended there and then.

All saw that there was to be a larger game played, where the stakes were human lives.

The boy was aroused, he was on his mettle, and about four-fifths of the men in the saloon knew that his charge was doubtless true.

Many had been surprised to see him play as a partner of Red Sam, while the other two at the table were of the worst desperado stripe.

Buffalo Bill and Bunco had been watching the game.

They had seen enough to convince them that the assertion was right the youth had made.

Both had seen that looks were passing between the three men, and several times they were sure cards had been slipped under the table from Red Sam to the others to play against his own partner.

There was a moment of deep silence after Red Sam's words, followed by the bold utterance of the youthful sport.

His accusation against the other two men fell like a thunderbolt.

Then he covered the boss bully, and yet put his life at the mercy of the other two men he accused.

Did he trust in his youth protecting him?

Did he trust in a love of fair play in the crowd which would not allow him to be attacked while he held Red Sam under cover?

Whatever it was that prompted him to be so utterly reckless, the other two men determined to take advantage of his having his hands full, and quickly they whipped out their revolvers and leveled them at the youth.

There was no move among the crowd as they did so.

Emboldened by this, one of the men blurted forth:

"Now draw ye'r gun, Red Sam, and squar' it fer ye'rself and us, fer we has got him dead to rights with our weapons."

"Pardon me if I take a hand in this unequal game, for I have you two covered."

It was Buffalo Bill who spoke, and he held a revolver in each hand.

And each weapon was aimed at one of the men who had so suddenly turned upon the youthful sport.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE EVE OF DEATH.

The sport did not move a muscle at the words of Buffalo Bill.

He did not even take his eyes off of Red Sam.

His revolver still covered the bully, and he had simply said, when the other two leveled at him:

"They may kill me, Red Sam, but you go first."

The crowd, however, all looked toward this man who had championed the cause of the sport.

They beheld one who was a stranger to them, but yet one who had a look about him that was square and plucky.

He had "chipped in," and he seemed just the man to maintain his hand.

The two men who had their weapons upon the youth could not but turn their gaze upon the speaker.

They saw a tall, splendidly-formed, handsome man, with a most distinguished air in spite of his border dress.

They saw that though he was not cross-eyed, he yet seemed to be looking at both at the same time.

There they stood, with revolvers leveled at the youth, eyes turned upon Buffalo Bill, and his weapons covering them.

The youth's revolver covered Red Sam, who did not dare show a weapon.

It was a five-cornered tableau, with death on the instant threatening four of the five.

The crowd stood spellbound.

It was a grand situation for the lookers-on, if some shots did not come their way.

They had never seen its equal before.

Fights they had seen in a crowded saloon, when half a dozen men gave up existence, but such a thrilling, fatal-appearing tableau was new even to the desperadoes of Devil's Canyon.

Buffalo Bill having stepped in to the aid of the young sport, was not a man to let matters hang fire for want of action.

He realized that he had taken his life in his hands by doing what he did.

He knew that he was a stranger there, hence would be regarded as a foe by more than half of the men present.

Bunco was the only one he knew; but he was well aware that he could depend upon him to the death.

He had seen him tried too often before when a scout under him.

But Bunco had wished to keep him out of this affair.

He knew but too well just what Devil's Canyon men were.

As a stranger he feared that the men would consider Buffalo Bill an officer of the law, and as about four-fifths of the community were dodging justice, he was well aware that they would be only too anxious to have him put out of the way by a bullet fired among others.

But Bunco saw it all coming.

He knew that Buffalo Bill was the last man in the world to seek trouble, that he had always avoided it.

But then, too, he was not one to see the weak imposed on by the strong.

The boy had seemed at the mercy of the desperadoes, and, reading his former chief's face, Bunco saw that he would go to the rescue of the boy.

Having done so he went in to stay, to see it through.

"Come, down with your weapons, both of you, from covering that young man, for I say you were cheats, and I saw you, and that man, slip cards under the table."

"You are a trio of rascals, and were robbing the boy."

There was no mistaking this utterance, and the crowd enjoyed it.

"Who is you, and what has you got ter do with it, stranger?"

It was Red Sam who spoke.

He had asked the question with a motive. That motive was to have Buffalo Bill turn on him, giving his pards a chance to level at him and kill him.

Bunco saw the trap, and his hand crept near the butt of his revolver.

Would Buffalo Bill fall into the trap? No, he was not to be caught like that.

He saw through the ruse.

Without taking his eyes off the two men he had covered, Buffalo Bill answered:

"My name is William Cody, and I am not ashamed of it, while I take it upon me as a right to defend that brave boy, whom you three scoundrels were robbing and then sought to kill."

"Come, drop your weapons, or I'll kill you both!"

The men hesitated, but they obeyed.

The crowd was becoming anxious and nervous.

"Will some gentleman who believes in fair play disarm those two men?"

"Boy sport, keep your gun on that fox, or he'll down you yet," and, without taking his eyes off the two men, Buffalo Bill first addressed the crowd and then the youth.

CHAPTER V.

FORCED TO TERMS.

"I'll clip their claws, for it isn't a square deal to see three against the boy, and you did right to chip in, pard."

The speaker was Brad Burns, the keeper of the Sports' Delight saloon, and landlord of the Wide Awake Inn.

He was a man that was respected, and also feared, and one who could be as rough as the roughest, any way they pleased, if he was roused to it.

All saw when Brad Burns acted that the stranger was gaining ground.

He quickly stepped up to the men and disarmed them, remarking:

"You two knew better than to try on a sneak game in my saloon."

"Now get out, and send a pard for your guns."

"If you come in here again, you'll have to deal with me, so if you intend coming I advise you to go down the canyon first and pick out your burial lot."

The crowd laughed. Matters looked better.

Then some one called out:

"Now, Brad, go for Red Sam."

The one who spoke evidently didn't like the landlord, and supposed he would vent his spite through Red Sam.

But the landlord was equal to it, for he said:

"No, the sport's got him covered, and that is not my row."

"But if Red Sam intends to play thief here, he'll find it can't be done, and I know it."

A faint cheer greeted these words.

Some felt that honesty should be encouraged.

But the first situation remained unchanged.

Buffalo Bill had lowered his weapons, but the sport still had Red Sam under cover.

The latter was white-faced now.

The situation was growing very irksome to him.

What would the boy do?

Then a thought flashed through the mind of Buffalo Bill.

He had but half done his work, in going to the aid of the youth.

If the boy had been robbed, and there was no doubt on that score, the two men whom Landlord Burns had bade leave his saloon had the money.

They had not yet gone out of the saloon, but, with black, malignant faces, were slowly moving toward the door.

"Hold there!"

"Come back, both of you."

Buffalo Bill's voice rang out.

There was no weapon leveled at the men, for they had been disarmed by Brad Burns.

But there was a look in the scout's eyes that meant all he said.

The men turned at his command, for instinctively they knew that he had addressed them.

"What does yer want?" one of them growled.

"Boy Sport, how much money did those men rob you of?"

"Three hundred dollars."

"Hold there! and I'll send a bullet through you, for I saw that."

Others saw it, too.

The two men had attempted to hand to a pard near them their money.

"Come back here and lay on that table three hundred dollars!"

"I won't."

"I won the money."

"Obey or refuse."

"Which shall it be?"

Buffalo Bill's revolvers were out now.

Again the two men were covered.

And they were cowed as well.

Slowly they approached the table, and each reluctantly threw a roll of bills upon it.

"Will you, sir, count that money?"

Buffalo Bill spoke to the landlord.

Brad Burns did as he was told, and called out:

"Sixty in this pile and seventy-five in this."

"Hand out the balance."

"I mean it."

"I hain't got no more."

"Ther boy lies."

But Buffalo Bill did not take these answers.

"Come, hand out the rest of that stolen money."

There was no getting around it, and the two men sullenly obeyed, one of them saying:

"We'll even up with you, stranger, when you don't hold ther full hand yer is playin' to-night."

"All right, any time," was the scout's careless reply.

The two men then moved again toward the door, while the crowd once more turned its attention to the young sport and Red Sam.

But the crowd were awed by the pluck of the stranger, though only Bunco knew him as Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts for the department of the Platte.

The rest wondered who he was.

And all this while, which was only a few moments, though it had seemed so long—an age to some, perhaps—the young sport stood covering Red Sam the desperado with his revolver, and his hand was as steady as iron; his look as determined as ever.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO FATAL SHOTS.

All eyes were now upon the young sport and Red Sam.

The other affair with Buffalo Bill had thus far passed off without bloodshed.

How would this scene end.

"There's your money, boy pard, they robbed you of, when you have done with your man before you," said Buffalo Bill.

Was this a hint for the youth to end the suspense.

What would he do? Before the boy could act, before any one could surmise what he would do, there came four shots.

They were fired so rapidly and so close together that it seemed that the four reports were but the echo of one.

The four shots were fired by four men.

The two desperadoes had reached the door, and then turned.

That Brad Burns had not done his work well, in disarming them, was proven by the fact that each had a smaller weapon in an inner pocket of his shirt.

These, with mutual consent and determination, they had drawn as each man reached the door, which was open.

They turned together, each man leveled a weapon at the same instant, and each one had selected his game.

The man on the right had picked out Buffalo Bill for his victim.

The man on the left had selected the boy sport as his game.

No one had seemed to notice these two men.

They were supposed to be out of the game.

So when they thrust their right hands into their woolen shirts and drew out their concealed weapons, it seemed but two persons saw them.

One of these two was most deeply interested.

It was Buffalo Bill. He saw only that the man had drawn a hidden weapon and was about to kill the boy.

So, with that lightning-like rapidity for which he has always been noted, he raised his weapon and fired.

He was just a second too soon for the other man, whose aim was at the boy sport.

But his aim was quick enough, and sure enough to save the youth.

His bullet pierced the brain of the murderous desperado, and the aim of the latter was wild, for the convulsive clutch of death upon the trigger had exploded his revolver, and the muzzle was jerked upward.

At the instant Buffalo Bill saw the act of the desperado to kill the boy, he did not see that the other man also had a concealed weapon.

He did not see that he had also drawn it, and, more, that his aim was at him.

But he was protecting the young sport.

Still, there was one to protect him.

There was one who did not see the desperado draw a weapon and aim at the sport, but did see his pal thrust his hand into the bosom of his shirt, snatch out a revolver and aim at Buffalo Bill.

And he was one who was marvelously quick on the draw, the aim and in pulling a trigger.

He was a dead shot, too.

So he got his shot in just two seconds ahead of the one who intended to kill Buffalo Bill.

But those two seconds counted, for when the man drew trigger he was already dead.

His bullet also went up into the roof of the cabin.

And both desperadoes went down together, one on each side of the door.

The one who had thus saved the life of Buffalo Bill was Bunco, the ex-scout.

And Brad Burns, the landlord, had seen the little side game, and would have chipped in, only Buffalo Bill and Bunco were too quick.

Thus had the four shots been fired, two men were dead, and the crowd stood amazed, for it was not so easy to see just what had happened.

It took but a moment, however, to discover.

Then they saw that Buffalo Bill was a quick and dead shot, and that he had saved the life of the young sport.

They saw, too, that Bunco, a man whom all liked, but no one knew well—a man who had kept clear of any trouble in the camps—had suddenly shown himself the friend of the stranger, and had saved his life.

He had shown that he was a dead shot, too, when necessity demanded it.

Both of the desperadoes had been shot fairly and squarely in the forehead.

And all this while the young sport was still keeping Red Sam in dread of his life and under cover of his revolver.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPORT'S PLUCK.

With the two desperadoes dead, Buffalo Bill and Bunco, standing, as it were, ready to be challenged for their act, and the boss bully of them all, Red Sam, standing in the very face of death, the crowd were beginning to feel that the situation was something they would not have missed for a great deal.

To some it was even enjoyable.

To others it showed plainly what Devil's Canyon was capable of in an emergency.

Buffalo Bill had fired at one he knew to be an out and out scamp, to protect the life of the boy sport, whom he had taken a fancy to.

Bunco had fired to save his friend, the scout.

And both stood ready to accept the consequences.

But the eyes of the crowd were not upon them.

They had acted well their part.

Now, what would the boy sport do?

He did not keep them long in waiting to find out.

Without looking, he knew what had happened.

Words about him told him that much.

He had not even seen his defender, Buffalo Bill.

His eyes were all for the man confronting him, and who was becoming nervous under the steady stare of that deadly revolver.

When the hum of exclamations were over, that followed the four quick shots, the young sport spoke.

"Red Sam, you have shown nerve, and you are in luck that you have not gone on the same trail your pards have just taken."

"I don't wish to kill you, for I raise my hand against no man that I have not just cause for doing so."

"You cheated me, and I caught you at it."

"You and your pards robbed me, and though I play only for the sport, the excitement of the game, I will not be cheated."

"I have gotten my money back, through the kind interest in my behalf of some unknown gentleman, and I am perfectly willing that you should go."

"Better kill him."

"He'll down you if you don't."

"You'll only turn a snake loose ter bite yer, young sport."

"Shoot him now, and say no more about it."

"No. have a square duel atween yer."

"That's the talk!"

Such were the expressions heard upon all sides.

The boy sport did not move.

But the eyes of Red Sam were ranging over the crowd to mark those who were expressing an opinion against him.

"No, there has been enough of bloodshed for one night.

"You can go, Red Sam, for I do not fear you."

Pluckily uttered were the words, and then the revolver was lowered.

It did look, just for a second, as though Red Sam was seeking his revolver when the boy sport's weapon no longer covered him.

But somebody, just who nobody knew, called out:

"Take care, Red Sam!"

Whatever had been his intention, he checked it.

He was glad that he had, for somehow his eyes met those of Buffalo Bill, and he saw then that he would have been a dead man had he attempted to draw his revolver.

He was much delighted for that warning cry that had saved him.

But Red Sam knew that he was expected to say something, and he wished to still get out of the affair with honor to himself, from his way of viewing it.

So he called out:

"I thanks yer for nothin', boy pard, but ef yer was a man I'd say jist let us settle ther matter in a squar' stand-up fight."

"I was man enough to keep you cowed, Red Sam, for five long minutes, and I would meet you as you say, but I don't wish to kill you."

A laugh greeted this remark.

It was to many a square backdown on the part of the young sport.

Several others present seemed to see it in a different light.

As for the desperado, he roared out:

"Yas, yer backs down now, when it's a square game; but yer crowed mighty big when yer had ther drop on me."

"No, I accused you of robbing me, and it was proven.

"Your pals lost their lives, yours I gave to you, and I got my money back.

"Let it go at that."

"I says no."

"What do you wish, Red Sam?"

"A stand-up fight a'tween us, with weapons in our hands."

"Yes, that's a squar' deal," cried a number of voices.

"Yer can't back down, boy sport, and hang out arter it in Devil's Canyon."

Buffalo Bill seemed about to speak, and, noticing the fact, the young sport cried, quickly:

"I will meet you, Red Sam, if you let me choose the weapons."

A perfect yell of admiration at the sport's pluck greeted these words.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOY SPORT AND HIS SECONDS.

The pluck of the boy sport, in thus offering to face the huge and terrible desperado, a giant in strength, and as merciless as an adder, won for him a tremendous round of applause.

All eyes were upon him now.

But he stood wholly unruffled, and waited for Red Sam to reply.

Every eye then turned upon the desperado.

He seemed too amazed at first to speak.

But the crowd demanded a reply, and at once.

He saw it, and said:

"See here, it hain't no squar' game ter put a boy ag'in' a man, and so I says let it go as it are."

"No, you were going to kill me, but

thought better of it, and then you said I must fight you.

"Now you say let it stand as it is, and I say no, for if I was man enough to rob, I am man enough to fight, unless you confess yourself a coward."

A perfect roar burst from the desperado at this.

"A coward!"

"Why, I'd fight yer if you was a baby."

"No doubt of that.

"The younger the better," was the sport's quick rejoinder, and it was well received by most of those present.

At the decision of Red Sam all looked pleased, save a few.

Among those few were Buffalo Bill, Bunco and Brad Burns, the landlord.

Then they exchanged glances, and they read each other aright.

They did not intend to allow it.

But as Red Sam, having urged what he called a square fight, had now been forced to back up his words and had said he would meet the sport, the latter said pleasantly:

"All right, Red Sam, we'll fight.

"But I choose the weapons."

"I don't keer what yer chooses," growled the man.

Then the sport glanced over the crowd, his eyes resting an instant upon the two dead forms lying by the door, and then upon the table, where his money still lay.

Stepping forward, he picked this up, and, tossing it to Brad Burns, said:

"Landlord, just keep this to deal out to poor fellows who are hard up and need it, or who are sick and in distress."

"I'll do it, sport, and it's jist like you, while I know half a dozen it will help," said Brad Burns, and a cheer was given for the youth, whose eyes still roamed over the crowd.

At last they rested upon Buffalo Bill, and, stepping forward, the sport held out his hand, while he said:

"Are you the gentleman who came to my aid?"

"Yes, for I do not believe in seeing a boy roasted by a man."

"Your shot saved my life."

"I hope so."

"And you made them disgorge my money."

"They robbed you, so had to give it up."

"You are a stranger in Devil's Canyon?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you have no business here, take a boy's advice and get out, for it's no place for an honest man."

"Thanks, but I came here to look about, to prospect a little, and I think I shall hang my hat up here awhile, as I may strike it rich; at least, I'll have a try at it before I leave."

"I am sorry; but will you do me a favor?"

"If I can."

"I have told this desperado I would meet him."

"I was sorry to hear it, for no man would blame you if you refused."

"I did not wish to kill him; at least, not until he forces me to do so," and there was a strange significance in the way the last few words were uttered.

"He will kill you, if he can."

"Oh, yes, but that is just where I am determined that he shall not, and I am going to ask you to be my second."

"Certainly; only I urge against your meeting that man, and have a proposition to make."

"Name it."

"Let me take your place."

All looked surprised at this, while Red Sam, who had listened attentively to all that had been said, roared out:

"I'll try it on with you after I've done ther kid up."

"No, I will fight my own battle, but I thank you just the same, sir; and let me tell you that I can take care of myself better than you know."

There was a confidence in the look and words of the youth that encouraged Buffalo Bill, who said:

"Let me suggest, as I am a stranger, that I invite two other gentlemen here to also be your seconds."

"As you please, sir."

"Then I will ask the landlord and this gentleman," and he pointed toward Brad Burns and Bunco.

"I will aid you, sport," said the landlord.

"Count me in, boy pard," added Bunco.

Then Buffalo Bill felt that he had the strength of the crowd on their side, and, turning to Red Sam, he said, sternly:

"Now, sir, name your seconds, and we will quickly settle this matter."

CHAPTER IX.

A SURPRISE.

Red Sam was not exactly pleased with the turn matters were taking.

He wanted a draw-and-shoot, rough-and-tumble, knock-down and drag-out affair, not one where all was arranged.

This looked too business-like to please him.

Then, if he killed the boy, many would be against him, he well knew, and he would get no credit for pluck.

He did not like to see Buffalo Bill brought into the affair as a second.

There was a look about the scout he feared, a certain calm carriage and a dignity that impressed him.

He did not know who he was.

Had he known him as the celebrated border scout and detective in buckskin, Buffalo Bill, Red Sam would have gotten out of the Sports' Delight saloon in double quick time.

Then, too, he had a secret dread of Bunco, whom he looked upon as a mysterious man, too quiet by far for any good in Devil's Canyon.

Brad Burns, the landlord, he had another wholesome fear of, because he was an honest man.

But the facts were before him that the three were the boy sport's seconds, and he determined to square matters by picking out the storekeeper and two other men who stood as not of the lawless class.

They would give him standing he felt.

So he made the demand upon the three by calling them to his side as seconds.

Not one of the three moved, but Bent Tobin, the storekeeper, said bluntly:

"You make a mistake in calling upon me to serve you, Red Sam, for I am not of your kind, and I don't believe the others you name will serve you."

"For what reason?"

"Well, I for one don't go in your set."

"Count those my sentiments," said a second one of the three, while the third called out:

"Yes, don't try to mix oil and water, Red Sam, for it don't go.

"I'm one of the few in Devil's Canyon for law and order, and you are dead against both."

"You is all too blamed good ter suit me," growled Red Sam, while Bent Tobin said:

"That's a compliment, Red Sam.

"Take men of your stripe to do your dirty work, for to fight that boy is about as mean a thing as even you could do."

"Ther boy pushes ther fight upon me, whar' I'd jist spank him and be done with it."

"Come get your seconds, if you can find any one to serve you," sternly said Buffalo Bill.

Red Sam looked calmly over the crowd.

He had failed to get good men to act for him, so he would now pick out the worst there were in Devil's Canyon.

They were all there, good and bad, and the latter predominated five to one.

He soon spotted three men, and simply motioned to them.

They stepped out without more ado.

"Here's my gang to sarve me, stranger, and they is all gents from wayback, and thar's no slouch about 'em, or goody-good style nuther."

"Thet one be Pete Dunn, this one are Ben Lucas, and ther third are Doc Stone, all at yer service."

Buffalo Bill nodded indifferently to the men at Red Sam's introduction, and said, addressing Doc Stone, as the best of the three where all looked bad:

"My young friend here, whom you know as the boy sport, has decided to give Red Sam satisfaction, and we are to arrange for a meeting between them, and, as the challenged party, we have the choice of weapons. I will select revolvers at ten paces."

"Hold on, sir, please, for revolvers are not my choice," cried the boy sport, to the surprise of every one present.

"What is then?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I will fight with no other weapons than those nature has given me—fists."

A loud laugh greeted this announcement, and no wonder.

Red Sam gave a rude chuckle, and all were surprised at the daring of the young sport.

Red Sam was considerably over six feet in height, with great, broad shoulders, a bull-like neck, arms of great length and corded with muscle, while his hands were of enormous size, and like iron in hardness.

He was well set upon his legs, and weighed some pounds over two hundred, while he was known to strike a blow that would kill a mule.

The young sport was as completely his opposite as well could be, weighing seventy-five pounds less, eight inches less in height, and of a slender, yet compact build.

His hands and feet were small enough for a woman, and it seemed as though one blow of Red Sam must kill him.

"You surely do not mean what you say?" said Buffalo Bill.

"Certainly I do."

"Why he will crush you."

"It is catching before hanging," was the calm response of the youth, upon whom all eyes were turned with surprise at his temerity.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPORT AND THE DESPERADO.

"That man has been a prize-fighter, and it was because he killed a couple of men by his blows that he had to fly, for I've seen him in the prize ring," whispered Doc Stone to the young sport.

"Yes, you cannot stand against him an instant, sport," said Brad Burns.

"I know what I think I can do," was the confident reply.

Buffalo Bill had said no more.

He was used to the strangest of surprises, and he had said to Bunco:

Science and quickness are better than brute strength.

"I believe the boy knows what he is about."

"As I does," returned Bunco.

So the arrangements were made for a battle with nature's weapons, the youth whispering to Buffalo Bill:

"Stick for a big ring, and to begin the fight with each man in his corner."

This Buffalo Bill did hold out for, and it was agreed upon, Red Sam seeming hardly interested in the affair any longer.

"I will tackle the stranger when I polish the kid off, and it won't be in a prize ring," he muttered so his admirers should hear him.

The crowd was delighted at the prospect of more trouble still.

The man and the boy stripped for the fray, or rather the boy did, as Red Sam merely took off his weapons.

The sport took off all of his weapons, his boots, his hat and jacket, and then the comparison between the two seemed ridiculous.

"See that your man strips himself of every weapon, for if he shows any I shall deal with him in a way he will not like," was Buffalo Bill's threatening remark, and Red Sam was seen to hand something else to Doc Stone, as though the scout's words had frightened him.

Then the two took their stands opposite each other, in a ring that had been formed of tables put end to end in the saloon, and thus forming a circle.

The crowd stood around on the outside, the seconds of the two fighters had a bench to stand on, and the space thus encircled was about twenty-five feet in diameter.

"Are you ready?" called out Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, indeed," glibly said the sport.

"Yas, come, kid, and git ye'r spankin'!" said Red Sam, and his admirers laughed.

The "kid" did come, and with a rush.

It startled the big man, who quickly

made a spring toward him, then threw himself on his guard and made a lunging blow.

But up into the air went the boy, higher than the head of the desperado, and then with terrible force his bare feet were driven full in the breast of his antagonist, who staggered backward under the blow.

But the sport was off from him in an instant, before he could be grasped by the half-dazed bully, and then he came with another flying leap and landed right in the face of his big foe.

This time Red Sam went down, the criminal flying from his nose, cut lips and brow.

He fell like a log and the sport stood over him, ready for another spring.

"Knocked out, by thunder!"

"He's kilt him!"

"Yas, he's dead!"

"Ther kid fights with his feet."

"Never touched him with his fists!"

"Ther kid kin outjump a deer!"

"Is he dead, Doc?"

Such were the comments on all sides from many.

Others stood dazed with surprise.

Doc Stone, once a physician before he

turned desperado, had been listening to Red Sam's heart beat.

"No, he's not dead, but that first blow

broke his collar bone in two places and

knocked him breathless, while the second

stunned him, and cut him on the brow

and the lips, while it bruised his nose and

broke out a couple of teeth.

"Boy, you are a terror."

A yell greeted the words, and the friends

of Red Sam bore him out of the saloon and

off to his cabin for Doc Stone to work

upon, while the crowd ranged alongside of

the bar and began to drink.

"Come, kid, and take somethin'!" was

an invitation the sport refused scores of

times.

But he refused all; no one had ever seen

him take a drink or smoke a cigar, nor had

heard him utter an oath, but he would

play cards, and men called him a terror.

As soon as he drew on his boots and

jacket, and put his sombrero jauntily upon

his head, he turned to Buffalo Bill, and,

thanking him for his services, slipped

quickly out of the saloon.

The scout accompanied Bunco and Land-

lord Brad Burns to the quarters of the

latter, and when they were seated in what was the best room in Devil's Canyon, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, Mr. Burns, I wish you to tell me all that you know about that young sport, all that you can tell!"

CHAPTER XI.

A SECRET AMONG THREE.

In answer to the request of Buffalo Bill, Brad Burns took his pipe out of his mouth, and said:

"You know about as much as I do, Mr. Cody, regarding that strange youngster."

"Do you know his name?"

"I do not."

"And more, I do not believe there is a man in Devil's Canyon who does."

"To every one he is only known as the Kid and the Boy Sport."

"When did he come here?"

"A year ago."

"From where?"

"No one knows."

"He just came quietly into the camp one night, well mounted and armed, and set to work."

"Doing what?"

"First he located himself in a cabin in an obscure spot in the hills, just at the head of a little valley, and where there was a small spring."

"The cabin was built by the Mormons as a stopping place when they followed the trail through here, but it was too far from the camps to suit any one here, and the boy's taking it didn't conflict with any one, so he has lived there."

"Then what did he do?"

"Well, he calls himself a gold hunter, and prospects for ore, I know, while he comes into the camp every night and often gambles, winning far more than he loses."

"He has been in several difficulties?"

"Yes, and come out on top, for he has killed two men to my knowledge, and for just cause."

"He is a wonderful young fellow, and utterly fearless, for it has been said the Silent Slayers would nip him in his cabin some time, but he shows no fear of them whatever."

"You have talked to him?"

"Often, but he is as silent as a clam about himself."

"He pays cash for all he gets, and just appears to enjoy the wild life he leads."

"How old do you think he is?"

"I should say, by his looks, seventeen, but by his deeds and experience, twice that."

"And he will not talk of himself?"

"Not one word."

"But he is not one to forget a favor, and all like him because he goes the rounds helping the sick and those in distress all he can."

"You saw him give me that money to-night?"

"Yes, and it was a most generous act."

"It is his way of doing business, and you may be sure he will never forget the service you rendered him to-night."

"It was but my duty."

"True, but you did it well and took big chances in doing it."

"You must look out for Red Sam, though, and also for his three pards, you know, and he has others you do not know, but I will spot them for you, as will Bunco here also, for he knows them all."

"Yes, I think I do," was Bunco's quiet reply.

Then Buffalo Bill asked:

"Now, landlord, what do you know about the Silent Slayers?"

"Nothing."

"You mean that you do not know who they are?"

"I mean that I know that there is a secret band in Devil's Canyon known as the

Silent Slayers, from the fact that they seem to be avengers, and kill their victim in a most mysterious manner.

"A man is found dead with a knife in his ribs, and a slip of paper is pinned on his body, upon which is written in red ink:

"Avenged.

"THE SILENT SLAYERS.

"No. —"

"The number of the victim is given, and thus far they foot up twenty-one victims.

"Our best men and our worst have been among the list of victims, and so no one can tell why they are killed, or by whom."

"That is strange."

"It is, indeed, and it is causing Devil's Canyon to thin out, for men are moving away, for fear of being secretly slain by these assassins, whom no one can place."

"Do you think the young sport knows anything about these Silent Slayers?"

"How so, Mr. Cody?"

"Could it be possible that he can be in any way connected with them, for Bunco tells me that it has been since his coming to Devil's Canyon the first secret murder by them was committed."

"Bunco is right as to that, but I can hardly believe it possible that the boy knows of these murders, or can be in any way interested in them."

"Nor can I, but you know I wish to get at the bottom of all the facts."

"True, and I will tell you all that I can.

"As to the Silent Slayers, they are as mysterious as death, and they are unknown to every one, it seems, for we men, not of the lawless kind, can find no clew to them, and I have been afraid to talk to any one on the subject, fearing I was conversing, perhaps, with one of the secret band of assassins."

"Well, we three know that we are to be trusted.

"I have told Bunco I came here for a secret purpose, and brought a letter to you.

"He is an old friend of mine, and I would trust him with my life—yes, you saw him save me from death to-night.

"Now, I am determined to find out who those Silent Slayers are, and bring them to justice, as well as discover the fate of the one I came here to find, for that he is dead, I feel assured, and it may be that these assassins are the guilty ones.

"I like that boy. I don't wish to believe him bad, but I must know just who and what he is, and we three must work secretly, and I believe we will meet with success in the end.

"Now, you both know me only as a prospector, and that it is not gold that I am prospecting for."

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

The occurrences in the Sports' Delight saloon created a sensation that was not forgotten in a night.

Red Sam had met more than his match, not only in the young sport, but in Buffalo Bill, who was at once named "The Man with the Iron Nerve."

Bunco had loomed up, too, out of his usually calm and retiring ways, and, altogether, there had been a decided change in affairs in Devil's Canyon, especially as two desperadoes had been wiped out, the pards of Red Sam.

The young sport had gone quickly to his home after the fracas, and his stock had gone up a hundred per cent.

Men did not know just how he had done it, but he had made a leap of six feet in height, had dealt two terrible blows with his feet, blows that were bone-breakers, and Red Sam had been most effectually prevented from doing further harm, at least for some days.

When he was able to get about again, there was not the slightest doubt, in the minds of those who knew him, that he would again go on the war-path.

That there must be trouble between him and the stranger, Buffalo Bill, no one doubted.

Then, too, he would not readily forget or forgive the fact that Bunco had sided with the young sport and the stranger.

What Landlord Brad Buns had done all knew would stand, and more, he would not be brought to book for it, as he had a hold upon the wild spirits of Devil's Canyon that not even Red Sam dare go against.

Such was the situation the morning after the affair at the saloon.

The stranger was known to have taken up his quarters at the Wide Awake Inn, and it was said that he had come to the vicinity of Devil's Canyon to prospect for gold, and Bunco was reported to have known him before, somewhere further north, and said he was an all-around good fellow, a skilled prospector, and if paying dirt was to be found about the camps he'd unearth it.

As gold finds were scarce, he was just the man the workers of Devil's Canyon wanted, and he was welcome.

Those who did nothing in the way of work saw him start out after breakfast, mounted upon a horse he had bought from Brad Burns, to give his own animal he had ridden there a rest, and they reported that he rode by the cabin of Red Sam.

They had seen him halt there and speak to a man who was seated in front of the cabin smoking a pipe.

That man afterward came up to the saloon to get some "medicine" for Red Sam and himself, and he reported that the Man of Nerve had asked him about the lay of the land and the prospects of gold finds, that was all, until he told him that it was Red Sam's cabin, and then he had politely asked how he was.

The man also said that Doc Stone had set the broken collar-bone, straightened up the mashed nose, dressed the cut lips and brow, and had otherwise fixed Red Sam up as best he could, and added:

"But he's a wreck to look at."

"His face looks as though he'd tackled a wildcat, and with his two teeth knocked out, eyes blackened, face cut and his bad temper, he's terrible, I can tell you.

"My! but there will be music when Red Sam gets around, again, for he does nothing but look at himself in a glass and cuss, and you know he's an expert in swearin'."

"Did the Man o' Iron Nerve know 'twas Red Sam's cabin?" was asked.

"Guess not, for he's a stranger in these parts, but thar' was a look in his face that told me that it wouldn't have scared him a little bit if he had."

"Did Red Sam know he was thar'?"

"Yes, after he had rode on, and he wanted to take his rifle and go gunning for him, but Doc Stone told him if he'd look at himself in the glass he'd think better of it, and he did; but he would not have let any other man tell him that but Doc, for he knows he depends upon him to fetch him around all right.

"Put me up a pint, Jerry, fer internal use," and the man turned to the bartender, who did as requested.

Armed with the flask, he returned to the cabin, and there sat Red Sam, black as a thundercloud.

"I s'pose all ther fellers hes ther big laugh on me," he growled.

"No, they said no man c'u'd fight a feller that had wings, like that boy has, and they hoped you would be about soon."

"I will, and then there will be a few funerals in Devil's Canyon."

"When is ther boys to be buried who were killed last night?"

"Yas, they has got ter be planted, and it's my treat to 'em, I s'pose.

"Jist fix 'em up a good send off, git all ther boys ter go who will, and tell them as is curious ter know thet I'll be on hand afore long and give a picnic sich as Devil's Canyon hain't yit seen."

And the man went off to obey instructions and bury the two dead desperadoes.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WITNESS TO A DUEL.

Buffalo Bill rode on his way beyond the cabin of Red Sam, then struck out across the canyon, which was a wide valley, in fact, and made his way toward the lonely home of the youth in whom he had taken such an interest.

He wished to see him and have a long talk with him.

The sport's cabin was situated all of two miles from any other house, and, having been told how to get there by Bunco, Buffalo Bill found no difficulty in finding his way where others could never have done so.

He did not care to have outsiders know of his visit to the youth, and so, when aware that he was not far from the cabin, he dismounted, hid his horse in the brush, and, with his rifle slung at his back, started on foot.

He had not gone very far, and was making his way up the little vale leading to the lone cabin of the sport, when he heard several shots fired in quick succession.

At once he bounded forward into a rapid run.

He felt sure that some of Red Sam's gang had gone to even up matters with the boy sport.

As he ascended a rise out of the vale he came upon a strange and thrilling sight.

He saw the boy sport, and he saw a bearded man, whom he recognized as Pete Dunn, one of Red Sam's seconds of the night before.

The man was backing off from the cabin, revolver in hand, and threatening the youth, who was boldly advancing upon him, also grasping a weapon.

Who had fired the shots he had heard Buffalo Bill could not tell.

The sport's back was toward Buffalo Bill, but the desperado saw him, and at once leveled at the youth and fired.

Instantly the youth returned the shot, and down upon his knees fell the man, but as he did so he showed that he was game by firing a last shot.

And that shot hit its human target, for the young sport reeled and fell across the body of his foe, just as Buffalo Bill came upon the scene.

A glance showed the scout that Pete Dunn was dead, and, fearing also that the young sport might be, he dropped down by his side.

No, he was breathing.

As he raised him in his arms, to bear him to the cabin, the hat of the youth dropped off, and Buffalo Bill saw that he had been wounded in the head.

Just above the forehead the bullet had struck, and quickly, and with considerable skill, from experience with wounds, the scout made an examination, and was delighted to find that the bullet had cut along under the scalp for several inches, and then made its exit, passing out through the crown of the sombrero.

"No bone is broken, and I hope it is only a stunning blow.

"But I will soon know."

So on to the cabin he bore the youth, and placing him by the spring, began to bathe the wound and the head and face, to revive him.

To his joy he saw soon that the youth was returning to consciousness, and be-

fore long he opened his eyes, fixed them upon the scout, and, after a moment, said:

"It is you, sir."

"Yes, your friend of last night."

"But Pete Stone came here to kill me."

"Yes."

"He fired three shots at me as I went out of the cabin and ran, supposing he had killed me, but he did not hit me, though he came very near it."

"And then?"

"I sprang for shelter, and then ran out with my revolver to fight him, for I was unarmed at first, and going with a bucket to get water from the spring."

"He had evidently been lying in wait for you to come out."

"That was just it, sir."

"And you went after him?"

"I called out to him to halt and have it out, and he seemed frightened, supposing I was dead."

"But he halted?"

"Yes, and we had it out, for I am sure I killed him, and when on his knees, falling, he gave me this wound."

"It came pretty near finishing me, too."

"It did indeed."

"But how did you get here, sir, and in the nick of time to help me?"

"I rode out here to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes."

"Can I do anything for you, sir, for I most gladly will?"

"Well, yes, I guess so."

"But we will talk of that later."

"Now, if you have a handkerchief, I will dress your wound, as I have some arnica with me in my saddle."

"I will go and fetch my horse."

This the scout did, and when he came back the youth handed him a clean and fine cambric handkerchief, on one corner of which his quick eye detected the initials:

"L. L."

But Buffalo Bill said nothing about the letters, and set to work to dress the wound with a skill past experience had given him.

CHAPTER XIV.

GETTING ACQUAINTED.

When he had finished dressing the wound, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, how do you feel, pard—by the way, what is your name?"

"Call me sport, if you will," was the quiet answer.

"All right, sport."

"Does your wound pain you?"

"It feels sore, but I don't mind that, for I have been accustomed to hard knocks."

"You don't look it."

"Appearances are deceitful often, you know."

"Why, I half suspected you of being a girl," and Buffalo Bill looked the young sport fixedly in the eye.

"But I am not, and God pity the girl who would have to do what I do," was the sad reply.

"You certainly know how to take care of yourself."

"Well, I have had to do so from force of circumstances."

"Where did you learn that leap and blow with your feet?"

"I have been an athlete from babyhood, I may say."

"You used Red Sam up pretty badly."

"I had to, for he had a knife in his shirt, as I knew, and he had threatened to cut my ears off to mark me, as a man whispered to me he had overheard him say so."

"I was therefore harder with him than I intended to be, though he certainly deserved no mercy, for he's a very bad man, Mr. —, Mr. —. I forget the name you

called yourself by last night; in fact, hardly heard it."

"Cody; but call me simply Bill."

"Cody, and Bill."

"See here, I have heard of a man by the name of William Cody, who was known as Buffalo Bill, and is a famous scout and Indian fighter."

"I have much admired him."

"Yes?"

"Yes, I have."

"Do you know him?"

"I have met him."

"Where?"

"Up in the Northwest."

"Are you Buffalo Bill?"

"Why, do you suspect me of being Buffalo Bill simply because my name is Cody?"

"Well, many people bear the same name, it is true, but you have another claim to the title of Buffalo Bill other than your name."

"What is that?"

"Your pluck, your looks, your face being stamped with heroism."

"You are so complimentary I must acknowledge my identity."

"Then you are Buffalo Bill?"

"I am."

"I am glad to meet you."

"I have often hoped I would do so."

"But if you are Buffalo Bill and here in Devil's Canyon, you are not here, as I heard last night, as a gold hunter."

"You don't think so?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, that is not your calling, and, knowing you now as I do, I feel sure you are here for some Secret Service work, such as hunting deserters from the army, or other bad men who have been guilty of some crime."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"Well, you are a pretty clever youth, I may say."

"Thank you."

"Suppose I tell you that I am not to be known here as Buffalo Bill, as I am here on Secret Service?"

"Well, I'll not betray you, sir."

"I believe that."

"But now, as you have identified me, let me see if I cannot find you out."

"That will be impossible."

"Why?"

"I am no one to find out, in the first place."

"I beg to differ with you."

"I am but a boy, for I am not yet twenty, though near it, but look younger than I am."

"Yes, I supposed you were about seventeen."

"No, I am nineteen, though I have gone through enough to make me look much older."

"You will tell me about yourself?"

"No, not now."

"When?"

"Perhaps some day."

"But can I help you here, for I know this country perfectly?"

"You may; but what is your calling?"

"I am a hunter."

"What are you hunting for?"

"Well, gold, say."

"That is not all."

"Why do you think so?"

"Some other motive than to find gold brought you here to this wild land."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"Well, I am like you, on a trail I do not wish known."

"You are prospecting for gold, and something else in particular, and so am I, let me admit, and if I can help you I will gladly do so, for you have already helped me more than I can ever repay."

"We'll let that go."

"But tell me, why did that man, Pete Dunn, seek to kill you?"

"Ah! I had forgotten him."

"It was because he was one of Red Sam's pards, I suppose; but do you know we must look after that body, as it would cause some trouble if found there, and I am not looking for more trouble just now, as I have plenty on my hands," and the sport's face wore an anxious look, the scout noticed.

CHAPTER XV.

A TELL-TALE MARK.

Going out of the cabin with the scout the sport led the way to where the body of Pete Dunn lay, just as it had fallen.

While in the cabin, Buffalo Bill had noticed almost every object.

It had two rooms, one used as combined kitchen and eating room, the other to sleep in.

There was a cot bed there, and the blankets were good ones and clean.

Some clothing and a hat or two hung upon the wall, and there were a rifle and shotgun in addition to the weapons the youth carried.

There were also extra revolvers and knives, a saddle, bridle, ax, hatchet and pick and shovel.

The cooking utensils were plentiful and well burnished up, and the table was white and clean.

In fact, all about the cabin indicated a neat inmate.

Without the cabin, in the rear was a shed for a horse, the animal, a wiry roan pony, being staked out near, feeding.

"You live here all alone?" suggested the scout.

"Yes, with Whalebone, my pony."

"Don't you get lonesome?"

"Well, no; I am more contented alone in my cabin than with such company as I find at Devil's Canyon."

"They are a bad lot, ain't they?"

"About as tough as I ever saw."

"But here is your enemy."

"Yes."

"You shot him through the heart, from this wound."

"I aimed to do so. What was he?"

"Gambler and hard citizen in general, and that's saying nothing of the dead victim."

"You play cards yourself, a little?"

"Yes, when I have a motive for doing so."

"To win money?"

"No, I care nothing for the money; in fact, I give all I win at cards away to those who need it more than I do."

"But see here."

The young sport had taken a slip of paper from a pocket of the dead desperado, and held it up.

"What is it?"

"This slip of paper."

"What does that mean?"

"Here is a pin, you see, and on the paper is written:

"Avenged!

"THE SILENT SLAYERS."

"Bunco told me something of a secret band of murderers."

"Yes, they have done a great deal of deadly work, and this is the badge they pin on their victims."

"Yes, here is the number, twenty-two, and that was intended for me, I am sure."

"I have suspected Pete Dunn of being one of the band, and this is proof, for see, here is the knife that was to go with it, and it bears the number also, you see, twenty-two."

"You are right, and you took it from his pocket?"

"Yes, with this slip of paper."

"That tells the story."

"It does to me."

"He came here to kill me, and ran off, thinking he had wounded me, and intending to come back after I died and fasten this tell-tale badge on me to have it known how I met with my death."

"Now, what shall I do with this body, for I do not wish it known that I killed him, as it will cause trouble, which I am anxious to avoid just now."

The youth looked puzzled, and Buffalo Bill, after a moment of thought, said:

"Let us put it upon the Silent Slayers."

"How?"

"Where does he live?"

"Over in the range, two miles from here, by a claim he pretends to work, though I do not believe he has dug out of it an ounce of gold in all."

"Does he work the mine alone?"

"Yes."

"And lives alone in his cabin?"

"No, a pard lives with him, but he runs a saloon over in the camps."

"And where is that pard now?"

"At his saloon, I think."

"Very well, leave it to me and I'll relieve you of all responsibility about this body."

"But that will not be right in me."

"Oh, yes. I'll carry the body to the mine and place it there, and put this paper and knife on it, so it will look as though he had been knifed, where your bullet cut its way."

The body will be found by his pard, and the Silent Slayers will get a setback that will surprise and worry them, while you come over to the Sports' Delight to-night, if you feel able."

"Oh, yes. I'll be there, and this will be a good one on the Silent Slayers, to do as you say; but suppose you are seen with the body?"

"I'll take all chances, and if I am, I'll simply say the man went out to kill and was not quick enough."

"It will get you into trouble, sir."

"Never mind me, for I came here to prospect for trouble," was the cool response, and leading up his horse, the body of Pete Dunn was strapped on his back, the sport told Buffalo Bill just how to find the cabin of the desperado, and away he started to carry out his intention of beating the Silent Slayers at their own game.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECRET WORKINGS.

Buffalo Bill showed his training as a plainsman in making his way to the home of the dead desperado and most skillfully covering up his tracks.

As he rode along he pondered over all that the boy had said, and had become convinced of one thing, that he was in no way connected with the Silent Slayers.

But he did believe that the sport knew something about this mysterious band of murderers—perhaps really more than any one else outside of the secret league.

He had noticed the unwillingness of the youth to tell who he was, but felt sure that it was not on account of any crime of which he had been guilty.

He had also recalled that he had hinted at what he had passed through, and that he had said he was in Devil's Canyon for a purpose, and also that he played cards for a purpose, and not taking his winnings for himself, had given the money to those who needed it more than he did.

All these things the scout thought over, and then said to himself:

"Well, we shall become better acquainted, for if I am not mistaken, he is the very one I need to help me in my work."

After a roundabout trail, Buffalo Bill came to the cabin of the dead desperado.

It was hidden away in a canyon, with signs about it that work had been done all about there in search of gold.

It was on the banks of a small stream, and the tools of the miner, if so he might be called, stood where he had left them when last at work.

The cabin door was closed, but not locked, and there was no one there.

Taking the body off the horse, Buffalo Bill took it into the cabin and stretched it out upon the floor, as though it had just fallen there, upon receiving a death wound.

His revolver was loaded, when the shots had been fired at the young sport, and the weapons were placed in his belt.

Then the knife was put upon his breast, stained with blood, and the slip of paper was pinned upon his breast.

His belt of money, and all else were left untouched, and closing the door the scout mounted his horse, which he had left standing in the little creek to cover up his tracks.

He had approached by way of the creek, so there was no trail to follow, and going back to the range, he continued on a wide circuit, not caring to return to the camp until later.

It was late in the afternoon when he reached the Wide Awake Inn, and Landlord Brad Burns greeted him.

"I was anxious about you, Cody, for I tell you this is the worst community it was ever my misfortune to dwell in."

"Oh, I'm all right, landlord; but there has been trouble."

"Again?"

"Well, Pete Dunn got himself into a scrape."

"Who with?"

"It's a secret, you know, but I wish you to keep about your saloon as much as you can and watch all hands when the report comes in that Pete Dunn has been killed by the Silent Slayers."

"Do you mean it?"

"Well, call it so, anyhow, for he'll have their badge on, knife and all."

"Where is he?"

"In his cabin."

"And dead?"

"He couldn't be more so."

"Where was his pard?"

"In the camp, I guess."

"Yes, this is his day on duty, and he'll find him when he goes out to supper, and then report it, and it will create a stir."

"I wish to be on hand to see just how much of a stir, and Bunco must also, for you know a great deal can be learned sometimes just by watching the faces of men when taken by surprise, and I feel sure that the Silent Slayers will be surprised when they know, or think they do, how Pete Dunn died."

"Well, Mr. Cody, you know your business and just what you are about, and I will be guided by you, for I have confidence in you."

"But I have something to tell you."

"Yes?"

"The boy hurt Red Sam more than at first appeared."

"Yes, a pard of his told me he was a wreck."

"And he seems to bear more ill will toward you than against the boy."

"That is all right."

"I have it from good authority that he intends to keep quiet until he gets perfectly well, and then come out boldly against you."

"I shall meet him as he may desire; but I will not be idle meanwhile, for perhaps I may be on the war-path after him before he fully recovers."

"Then you have some clew by which you can ensnare him?"

"Not as much as I could wish, but if he

is not one of the Silent Slayers, then I am very much mistaken."

"Well, you may be right, but have you seen the boy sport?"

"I have, and he'll be on hand to-night, though I must not be too friendly with him in public."

"Now, I'll go to Bunco's claim and look him up and post him."

CHAPTER XVII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLAN OF ACTION.

The claim of Bunco was down the canyon.

He worked it by himself, and now and then was rewarded by finding a handful of paying dirt.

If he got more he did not make it known to any one, or at least to the public of Devil's Canyon.

He worked hard, and was trying to build up a fortune again.

Buffalo Bill walked through the camp this time, leaving his horse at the Wide Awake Inn.

The men who saw him pass eyed him with considerable interest, and there was much talk about him.

With a number of men in the camp he had already rendered himself popular by his acts.

With others he was a cause of dread.

As a stranger, he was suspected of being there for no good to many who dwelt in Devil's Canyon.

A few, in fact, decided to lie low until it was found out just what his game was.

"Somebody will bring him up with a sudden turn," said one.

"He must show his hand soon," was the comment of another.

So it went on around the camp, the wonder increasing as to just why that good-looking stranger had put in an appearance at that time at that hard hole.

Buffalo Bill found Bunco hard at work with pick and shovel.

"Ho, pard Bill, glad to see you."

"Come in and have a pipe, for you know I keep nothing strong to give you."

"Thank you, Bunco, I just dropped in for a minute for a little talk."

"How is luck?"

"Better than I let it be known, pard, for this hole is not so nearly worked out as the lazy fellow I bought it from thought."

"No, it pans out fairly well, with a steady improvement, and I may yet get another fortune; but next time I'll be less a fool than I was before."

"Why, Bill, I deserve all I have suffered for being such a perfect greenhorn as to squander my fortune on others."

"We learn by experience, Bunco; but, I want you up at Sports' Delight early to-night."

"I'll be there; but is there to be more trouble?"

"I hope not."

"Still, one cannot always tell in a country like this just what to expect."

"You see, Pete Dunn will be found dead in his cabin by his pard, Hal Hastings, when he goes home for supper."

"He's no loss—just the kind that we called in last night."

"But Hastings will find that there is a knife on his breast, a wound, and a slip of paper saying as much as that the Silent Slayers did the work."

"Well, you surprise me, for my idea has been that he was one of that gang."

"Well, he may be, and it is just to watch the surprise of the men when they hear of it that I want you at the Sports' Delight."

"I'll be on hand."

"Landlord Brad Burns will be there, and so will the boy sport."

"You have seen the boy, then?"

"Yes, and had a long talk with him."

"Well, I remember now you were won-

to give us all surprises, pard, when I was a scout under you at Fort Hays, and it is just like you to call in Pete Dunn's chips when he gave you cause."

"Yes, it is just like you, pard."

"But I did not kill him, Bunco."

"Then who did?"

"I'll tell you all later; but I have seen the boy, and I believe matters are shaping to get my work through here much quicker than I thought."

"I hope so, for as long as you remain in Devil's Canyon I shall be anxious about you."

"And how about yourself, Bunco?"

"Oh, I don't count. I just go on in the even tenor of my way, and have no trouble with any one, while you are already suspected as having come here with a slip-knot to put around somebody's neck."

"Well, I was the cause of bringing you out last night in a way that may cause you trouble."

"No, it was the boy sport, Bill, and I did but my duty in killing the fellow before he could draw trigger on you."

"You know I appreciate it, Bunco."

"Oh, yes; I know that, as I do that you have saved my scalp half a dozen times; but here I am talking in the old way, because I am with you, an' it don't go here, pard, so I must drop inter ther border lingo ag'in," and Bunco went on to speak in the frontier dialect the few minutes more that Buffalo Bill was at his cabin.

Leaving Bunco, the scout sauntered through the camp, spoken politely to now and then by a denizen, and again scowled at with a malignant look by some one whose crimes caused him to dread him.

Back to the Wide Awake Inn for an early supper went Buffalo Bill, and soon after he was in Sports' Delight saloon, where he discovered that the boy sport and Bunco had arrived before him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEWS IS HEARD.

The Sports' Delight saloon began to fill up early, for after supper the men commenced to congregate there, to gossip, drink, gamble and to idle away the early hours of the night.

The young sport soon found a man to play cards with, and they were deep in a game, while Bunco sat at a table alone, smoking his pipe, as was his wont.

Landlord Brad Burns was there, with an eye upon all, and Buffalo Bill was seated at a table talking to two very hard-looking customers.

Suddenly there was heard without voices raised in an excited way, and the next instant Hal Hastings, the saloonkeeper, sprang into the saloon, his face white and manner unnerved as he called out:

"Pards, my friend, Pete Dunn, has been kilt dead in our cabin."

"I found him thar' when I went home ter supper, and ther shock nearly upset me."

"But, pards, who does yer think did ther deed?"

He looked over the crowd as he uttered the words, and every eye was upon him.

The saloonkeeper was not an unpopular man in Devil's Canyon, while Pete Dunn, his partner, had been.

The worst said against him was that he was Dunn's friend, said by those who did not like the desperado stripe.

But the two were not partners, really, though they occupied the same cabin together.

The saloonkeeper's life had been once saved by Dunn, and the latter had been invited to make his home with him and work his mine on shares.

As the one had the saloon, Pete Dunn was generally set down as the owner of the claim.

With his partner the saloonkeeper arranged his hours of work, one day on and one day off of duty, with both serving their customers when business was brisk in the evenings.

But the Sports' Delight saloon was the one of the camp doing the great bulk of business, and where ten men congregated to one in the other places.

So the comrade of Pete Dunn had rushed right to the Sports' Delight to make known the fatal news, knowing he would find there about half the people in the camp.

His tidings were received with a start by many.

This secret assassination of a man in his home awed them, where half a dozen men might be killed in a saloon and not create more than a flurry.

"Tell us about it, pard," said Brad Burns.

In response the saloonkeeper told his story.

"Pards, I hain't got over ther shock yit."

"Yer see, Pete saved me from death once, and though many here didn't like him, I did, and I shared my cabin with him."

"We was good friends and always talked at supper time when we wasn't busy."

"Well, I goes to my cabin after knocking off work, and though Pete always has supper ready, I didn't think nothing at seeing the door closed, and no smoke coming out of ther chimney, for I thought as how he were with his pard, Red Sam, ther sport done up so bad last night, fer I heerd all about it, and they do say it was beautiful, and how he just done it. Ther fellers I heerd talk—"

"But to Pete Dunn's death, pard, and never mind the sport and Red Sam!" broke in Brad Burns.

"Oh, yes, as I was a telling ye, I opened the door, and yer c'u'd hev' knocked me down with a feather, for thar' lay Pete, dead."

"And more, he had been murdered, for laying on him was a knife and slip of paper, ther latter tellin' how ther Silent Slayers hed done ther work."

A perfect yell went up at this startling information.

Men here and there sprang to their feet, and exclamations broke from many lips, while half a dozen voices broke out with:

"It hain't so."

"Ther Silent Slayers didn't do it!"

The eyes of Buffalo Bill, Brad Burns, Bunco and the sport were busy.

They were taking in the whole situation.

Their eyes were upon the men who asserted the innocence of the Silent Slayers.

"I tell yer they did, fer their knife was thar', and ther slip of paper tellin' thet they was avenged."

"Yes, pards, it's only a third of a mile, so come to my cabin and see fer ye'rselfes thet ther Silent Slayers done ther deed, fer it hain't dark yet."

There was a move of many as though to go, but Brad Burns called for order, and said:

"Pards, this killing done by the Silent Slayers is getting to be too frequent."

"Pete Dunn was a rough one, but he was a man in our midst, and his death thus must not be passed over."

"We must stand together in this matter and find out just who are the men who belong to this secret band."

"I say, therefore, that we must go about it in an orderly way, and as you have been pleased to make me a leader in Devil's Canyon, I will appoint a jury of six men to return with our pard here, turn the effects in the cabin over to him, for I guess he owns about all there is, and to see just how Pete Dunn did die, and dis-

cover, if possible, the causes that led to his death."

There was a chorus of cheers at the words of Brad Burns, but a few wished to go as a crowd.

These were frowned down, however, and the landlord appointed six men to accompany the saloonkeeper back to his cabin and investigate.

Others wished to go along, but Brad Burns was firm, and in refusing he "spotted" those who were most urgent and they were the ones who had said the Silent Slayers had not killed Pete Dunn.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE "JURY'S" REPORT.

Buffalo Bill had watched all with an eagle eye, but in silence. As a stranger he had taken no part in the affairs of the camp.

Glancing at the boy sport, he saw that the news did not seem to impress that cool youth in the slightest, that Pete Dunn was dead, and had been murdered by the Silent Slayers.

The scout also saw that Bunco, in his quiet way, was taking all in.

The plan of Brad Burns had pleased the scout.

He saw that the landlord was acting with a fixed purpose, and more, he was sure that he knew what it was, and they were in perfect accord.

The six men had been selected among those who were the best of the dwellers in Devil's Canyon.

Not one of the loud criers against the Silent Slayers being the murderers of Pete Dunn had been selected.

When several of these started to go with the "jury," Brad Burns called out that he felt the crowd would uphold him in saying only those he had picked out should go.

This the crowd did with a yell of approbation.

But as two men still attempted to leave the saloon, Brad Burns halted them in no uncertain tones.

"See here. The men of Devil's Canyon have selected a jury to investigate this murder, and if any one not appointed dares to go, I shall hold him up as a suspected person."

"Let them beware, for this Silent Slayer work has got to be put down."

"Do you all understand?"

It seemed that they did, for the malcontents dropped in their seats, when Doc Stone said:

"I'm going to see my patient, Red Sam."

"He will keep until after we know about this jury's report," answered Burns, and he continued:

"Remember, we are acting now for the safety of all, for no man's life is safe with the Silent Slayers at work in our midst."

"The man who fights against our purpose will have to answer for it."

The roar of assent that greeted this showed the malcontents that they dared not attempt to leave the saloon, and the jury departed, led by the saloonkeeper.

Then the games were resumed, and all went on as before for a while.

Believing himself unnoticed, Ben Lucas, one of Red Sam's seconds of the night before, quietly slipped out of the saloon.

"Hands up, there!"

He found himself covered by a man who stood just outside the door, and he quickly obeyed, for a rifle was leveled at him.

"I was going to the Golden Nugget saloon, landlord, for I has a engagement to play a game thar'," he said, recognizing Brad Burns.

"I could report you to that crowd within as a suspicious character, one who might belong to the Silent Slayers, but I will not this time."

"Get back into that saloon, quick!"

Ben Lucas obeyed with an alacrity that was amazing, and when he had dropped into the first seat he came to, he looked over toward Doc Stone and several others, and strange glances passed between them.

There were three in that saloon who saw those significant looks, had seen the man hold a few whispered words with several others, and then slip out.

They were Buffalo Bill, the boy sport and Bunco.

But the three knew that Ben Lucas would find Brad Burns just outside, and the way in which he returned white-faced into the cabin assured them.

In an hour's time the jury returned. They had left the saloonkeeper at his cabin with the body of his friend, and others were to be sent over to keep vigil during the night.

The spokesman of the six made his report, when Brad Burns came into the saloon from the little room back of the bar.

"Well, pard Wooten, what is your report?" asked Brad Burns, quietly.

"We found all as was reported by Jerry, sir, and there had not been a thing taken from the cabin, and Pete Dunn's belt of gold was about his waist, also his weapons.

"Upon his breast lay a knife and this slip of paper. Here they are."

He handed over the things named, which Brad Burns held up to the view of all, and then placed on the table by him.

"The wound was in Dunn's breast, and that the Silent Slayers had done the work was our unanimous opinion, for it is just as they have done twenty-one times before.

"Whoever dealt the blow must have been an unsuspected friend of Dunn, for his weapons had not been drawn, no charge was missing from his revolver, and it looked to us as though he had been taken wholly unawares, and that, to our minds, proved that he held no dread of harm against the man who murdered him.

"There was no trail near the cabin, sir, and the whole affair was as mysterious as the twenty-one other murders of the Silent Slayers of Devil's Canyon."

CHAPTER XX.

A PLOT OVERHEARD.

All had listened with the deepest attention to the report of the jury of six, and when the spokesman had finished, Brad Burns said:

"Pards, you have heard what your comrades say, and the death of Pete Dunn makes the twenty-second man who has been killed by the Silent Slayers.

"It now is for us to keep our eyes open to discover just who these men are, for I tell you frankly that there are members of that band of murderers now listening to me, now in our midst.

"If they were not those we deem our friends they could not do the work they do.

"They have a purpose, too, in their red deeds which we do not know, cannot fathom, but it is for us to get at the bottom of their deviltry, and when we find one of them, hang him, and so on to the end.

"I have no more to say to-night, except that I desire a few words with the jury-men in my office.

"If I have demanded that you remain here until the jury reported, it was for the good of all.

"Now you are at liberty to go and come at will."

The words of Brad Burns were generally received with applause, for the deeds of the Silent Slayers were beginning to come home to all of those who were not really members of the band.

"All I have to say to you, pards, said the landlord, heartily, as the jury filed into

his office, "is that you pass out of that door, and, as you can arrange it, follow those who go to the cabin of Pete Dunn, and report to me who they are.

"Do not let them suspect you are watching them."

The six men passed quickly out of the office, and soon after Brad Burns entered the saloon once more.

He walked over to where Buffalo Bill sat, and the two entered into ordinary conversation.

Bunco had left the cabin, and the boy sport was just ending up his game with the hard citizen with whom he had been playing, and from whom he had won quite a little sum of money.

Tossing it on the table before Burns, he said:

"Put that with the other, landlord, for the benefit of those in need. Good-night, for I am going home."

He passed out of the door, while Buffalo Bill arose and accompanied Brad Burns into his office.

The moment he entered, however, he said:

"I'll join you later in the hotel," and with this he slipped out of the office and disappeared.

Once outside the boy sport walked quickly away up the canyon, and was lost in the darkness.

Mounting his pony, for he always rode in at night to the camp, the young sport rode to a position beyond the settlement and came to a halt.

He drew into the shadow of some timber, and had waited for perhaps half an hour, when he saw a man coming rapidly toward him.

And the man was carrying a bundle.

"Ho, pard, are you there?"

"Yes, sir."

"I only caught your word to wait for you.

"What is up?"

"I heard one of those fellows in the saloon mention your name and say:

"We'll wait at his cabin."

"Ah! that means that I am booked for the happy hunting grounds, Mr. Cody."

"About that way, I took it."

"Bunco will be here in a minute, and see, I have brought a bundle here which we can dress up to appear to be yourself, and we can tie it to your saddle and then follow your pony to your cabin and watch results."

"Good!"

"We will give them a surprise party.

"But who are they?"

"They are men whom I spotted, among others, as belonging to the band of Secret Slayers."

"I got down six, Mr. Cody."

"And I seven."

"And Bunco was watching, too."

"Yes, and Landlord Burns, also, and we'll see how our reports tally, for I took the men whose faces revealed their guilt, as well as their actions."

"That is the way I picked them out—here comes Bunco."

Just then Bunco appeared, and he had with him several lariats, a sombrero, coat and pair of boots.

Buffalo Bill had brought a roll of blankets, and they soon had a very respectable-looking man dressed up and mounted on the boy sport's horse.

"I just caught your words, pard Bill, to get a rig to make up a dummy man, and you'd find the material for the body," said Bunco.

"Yes, I felt sure three of those fellows determined to entrap the boy sport here to-night at his cabin, and thought it best to use a decoy.

"Now, they left some time before sport did, and the fellow you were playing cards

with, boy pard, was in league with them, for, though losing his money, he kept urging you to remain until a certain time, when he knew that his pals could get to your cabin ahead of you.

"I watched the whole plot, and do not think I have made any mistake."

"I'll bet you haven't, pard Bill!" said Bunco.

"Now, sport, your horse is trained, you told me, so let him go on ahead, when Bunco and I have been gone long enough to get to your cabin.

"You follow behind your pony, and keep out of sight when you get near your cabin.

"If they are there they'll show their hand when your pony arrives, especially as they will suppose you are asleep when you do not dismount.

"When they show their game, Bunco and I will show that we hold trumps."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DECOY.

When the roan pony belonging to the boy sport started up the trail at a walk, any one passing him in the darkness would have supposed that it was the youth that was mounted upon him, so well had the dummy been made. It sat upright in the saddle, boots in the stirrups and all.

At first the sport allowed the pony to keep just the length of a lariat ahead of him, until he taught him just what was wanted of him.

Then he took off the lariat, and the well-trained animal faithfully kept the same distance ahead.

Buffalo Bill and Bunco had walked rapidly on toward the cabin of the boy sport, keeping as much off the direct trail as was possible, for the latter knew the country well and acted as guide.

Arriving in the little valley that led up to the cabin, they advanced with the greatest caution, flanked the little home, and, gaining the rear, crept up to the shed of the pony in the rear.

There they concealed themselves and waited in grim silence, for they now knew that the sport's foes were on hand.

Buffalo Bill had not been wrong. There were men in the front of the cabin, waiting for the return home of the youth.

Their voices were heard by Buffalo Bill as they talked in low tones, evidently in hiding against the dark cabin.

Distinctly, after waiting for a quarter of an hour, the two pards on the watch heard:

"Thar' he comes! Lie low, now, and jump onto him ther moment he gits off his horse.

"I'll do ther knife act, and they'll see that threats don't skeer off ther Silent Slayers."

Buffalo Bill and Bunco were not twenty feet from the assassins in hiding.

The hoof-falls of the pony had been heard, for it was too dark to have seen the horse and his rider.

Up the little valley came the pony at a walk, and soon drew in sight of the three watchers, for there were that number.

Nearer and nearer came the decoy rider, and the pony walked straight up to the cabin door and came to a halt.

But the rider did not dismount.

The assassins decided from the bowed head and silence that the rider was asleep, so with one accord they leaped out from the dark shadow of the cabin and seized, not the boy sport, but the decoy!

There was a dull thud as a sharp knife was driven with force into what was supposed to be the body of the boy sport!

Then two bright flashes revealed the scene for an instant, and before the reports had died away, two men lay prostrate upon the ground.

With a yell of terror the third had

bounded away in flight, when there came a swishing sound in the air, a lariat noose settled over his head, and he was dragged violently to the ground, just as Buffalo Bill came bounding after him like a deer.

The boy sport had caught the man in his flight most cleverly!

"Well done, boy pard. I almost feared he would get away," and the scout had the man by the throat now, as he knelt over him, and his revolver muzzle was in his face.

"It is Doc Stone!" said the boy sport.

"Yes, just the man we want, for he will be better than any of the rest for the work we need him for," declared the scout.

The man was silent, feigning to be stunned by the fall.

But the prick of a pin in Buffalo Bill's hand quickly brought a yell of surprise and pain from him.

"See here! No playing 'possum with me.

"Get up and come on, for we want you.

"Boy sport, just light up in your cabin, and we'll see what game is lying yonder under Bunco's care."

The weapons of the man were taken from him, and then the scout led his prisoner to the cabin, where the sport soon had a light.

The other two were brought in, both dead, and placed upon the floor, and Bunco said quietly:

"Ben Lucas and Barney.

"Two of a kind and pards of Red Sam.

"Doc Stone, you have gotten into pickle."

"What has I done?" asked the prisoner, who was terribly scared, as could be seen.

"Nothing, for we were too quick for you.

"But we wish to have a talk with you, and unless you wish to hang before daylight, you had best do some quick talking," said the scout.

"I don't know nuthin'!"

"See here; you were once a different man from what you are now. You received an education, were a physician by profession, and some crime you committed sent you a fugitive to this country."

"Now, you are here to save your neck from the gallows, and being an outcast, a fugitive from justice, you wish to make what you can out of it."

"That's about so," growled the prisoner.

"Now, these two dead men came here with you to kill this youth.

"You are all members of the Silent Slayers' band, as is also Red Sam; and of late no less than five of them have been wiped out—two in the saloon, Pete Dunn in his cabin, then two here, and Red Sam is used up and you are a prisoner, so you see we have got facts down fine against you, and if you care to talk we are willing to listen.

"If not, then you go back to the Sports' Delight saloon this night and hang," and Buffalo Bill spoke in a tone that showed he was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRISONER.

Doc Stone was in a very bad fix, and he had the good sense to perceive it.

He was above the men with whom he herded, or had been, that was evident, for he still had the bearing of a gentleman at times.

He now looked from Buffalo Bill to the boy sport, then at Bunco, and back again at the scout.

At last he said, in a helpless sort of way:

"What do you want?"

"I'll tell you, and then be guided by your own feelings wholly.

"I came down here to prospect, it is true, but not for gold exactly.

"It has come to the ears of the commandant of the fort, where I am an officer, that Devil's Canyon is as black a place as could be found.

"The deeds of you lawless men here have given it a very bad name, and I was sent here for a specific purpose.

"I supposed that it would take me months to shadow to the gallows the men I was after, but I discover, through meeting the boy sport here, and my old friend Bunco, I will accomplish what I came for in a very short while.

"Now, the acts of the Silent Slayers are known away from Devil's Canyon.

"It is also known that they kill for some purpose unknown to us.

"They have a motive that I can only guess at, and when I hear from you, I will know if my guess was right.

"The members of that secret band of murderers may number twenty, perhaps more, perhaps less, but I set them down as at least a dozen.

"As I have shown you, that with the five dead, Red Sam laid up for repairs, and your neck in the noose, six of them are accounted for."

"Does yer mean I'm an assassin?" indignantly asked Doc Stone.

"Yes, for I caught you in the act, and I overheard you say to your men that you would knife the boy sport.

"Bunco and I fired as we sprang into view, and two fell, and you might have escaped but for the sport's clever hand with his lariat.

"Yes, you are an assassin and one of the band of Silent Slayers, for there were several who watched you and your pards to-night, when it was reported that Pete Dunn was dead and had been killed by the Silent Slayers.

"And more, there are three more men whose looks betrayed them, and I can go and put hands on them to-night.

"Yes, you are known, for you betrayed yourself in more ways than one, and let me tell you right now that I can account for Pete Dunn's death, and in the morning those two bodies lying there will be found in their cabin, for Bunco says they live together, and upon their breast will be discovered the knives of the Silent Slayers and the slips of paper that have been pinned on the dead after your secret murders have been committed, for we have here the one you were to put on this boy. See?"

Doc Stone trembled from head to foot. He seemed to feel that he had been caught in a trap from which there was no escape.

He had heard the scout unravel the secret of the mysterious murders, and felt that he was wholly at his mercy.

After a moment of thought, he cried out in a tone of pleading that was most pitiful:

"What do you want me to do?"

"Confess."

"Confess what?"

"Everything."

"About what?"

"I see that you do not appreciate the danger you are in."

"You'll hang me?"

"No, I think we had better play the Silent Slayers act, knife you and leave you at your home to be thought to have been killed by that band.

"Then we can go on in our own way and find out who the others are, but I'll take good care that Red Sam, whom we know, does not escape."

"You wish me to confess my guilt?"

"Oh, no.

"Do as you please about it."

"If I confess?"

"Well?"

"What terms do you grant me?"

"Ah! now you are talking like a sensible man."

"You will give me my terms?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I'll give you my terms," was the stern rejoinder.

"I must know what they are before I utter a word."

"You shall."

"My terms are that you shall answer every question I ask you truthfully.

"In return your life shall be spared, you shall not be known as one of the Silent Slayers, though I would advise you to dig out from camp, as some of your pards might give you away, as soon as we have found out whether you have deceived us or not.

"Those are my terms."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DESPERADO'S TERMS.

Doc Stone heard what the terms of the scout were, and then asked:

"What will you do with me while you are waiting to find out?"

"We will leave you here a prisoner under the care of the boy sport."

"That won't do."

"It must."

"It will not do, then."

"Why?"

"If you do as you say with those bodies there, the real Silent Slayers will be puzzled as to how they died, and it will be laid upon the band."

"Well?"

"If I am missing they will at once suspect that I have sold out, betrayed them, and they will skip, and you will be thwarted."

"There is reason in that," said Buffalo Bill.

"Now, I alone of all the band will know the game's up, and I will not attempt to escape.

"Let me go back to Red Sam's cabin. I'll give him a quieting medicine to keep him there all right, and pretend he is not so well.

"Then you can go on with your work of catching the rest of the band, and when you feel sure I have been square with you, then you can set me free.

"Now listen to the terms I have to propose."

"You wish us to play the decoy game again—use you as a decoy to catch the rest of the band of Silent Slayers?"

"That is just it."

"But you have terms to propose?"

"Let us hear them."

"I will."

"In the first place, I can give you information that will not allow another member of the Silent Slayers to escape.

"Remember, I am selling out."

"Yes."

"I know that I have got valuable goods to sell, and I am aware of their full value."

"Go ahead."

"Those two bodies there have both got belts of gold on them."

"Well?"

"Now I have, say, some twelve hundred laid up, and they have not as much.

"But Red Sam can treble my amount, and I want what they have and he has."

"You will want a gold mine next, and have us work it for you."

"I've got the gold mine, or at least the means of getting it, and I am high-priced, for I won't reap from it, and you will, when I have told my secret."

"Go ahead."

"For that reason I am going to make a money demand of you."

"You already have done so."

"Oh, no; I get that as an inheritance, as it were, from my pards."

"Well?"

"You see I am to start out in the world again to make my fortune."

"I cannot stay in this country, for I'd hang."

"I must make my way to another land. I have a profession that will support me, and I am tired of this life of crime."

"To go away from here, I wish to have money to live on until I can get a support by my practice."

"Therefore, with what I have told you I wish, and which is no loss to you, I must have a couple of good horses and a complete outfit, and be allowed to light out at dark some night when you are sure that I have kept faith with you."

"All right, granted!"

"But now to my price."

"You have named it."

"Not the money for my secret."

"Then go ahead."

"As I said, my secret is valuable. It is of a gold mine, and I want for it just five thousand dollars."

"You'll never get it."

"Then you'll have to hang me, for I'd as soon die as go from here without money to dodge about these Western camps."

"I tell you that by my capture you have destroyed me, and ruined my prospects on the very eve of success, as it were, and I will die before I tell what I know unless I get my terms."

"I ask for a paltry five thousand dollars and you refuse."

"So be it. I can die, for I'd be worse off than dead if I lived."

There was that about the man that Buffalo Bill read aright.

He was desperate, driven to despair, and would do just as he had said.

So the scout said, for he felt certain that the man must have some valuable secret:

"Do you avow that your secret is worth five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, many, many times over."

"I am so convinced of it that I will take your promise to send me the sum named, when you discover that I tell the truth."

"That is square certainly; but I neither have the money nor can I get it."

"I have it, and will hand you the amount to send him, Mr. Cody, if he tells the truth," said the boy sport, speaking for the first time, while Bunco added:

"I can also raise the money, pard Bill."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PLEDGE.

"I guess I've struck a nest of millionaires," said Buffalo Bill, in his dry, humorous way, when both the sport and Bunco offered to put up the five thousand dollars demanded by Doc Stone.

"Well, I happen to have the money, and I will risk it on what Doc Stone says, upon your pledge to pay him if his secret is worth it," said the sport.

"Me, too, pards; or I'll go in halves with you, boy sport," Bunco replied.

This was satisfactory to the scout, if so to those who were to take the risk, and Doc Stone said all that he asked was Buffalo Bill's pledge to send it to him in a certain way if all was as he said it was.

"I'll give the pledge," said the scout.

"Then it's settled, pards, and I'll talk."

"Now, let me tell you when I decide on a thing I go through with it."

"You talk good English, Stone, so drop your dialect," said Buffalo Bill.

"All right, I will."

"What do you wish to know?"

"You are a Silent Slayer?"

"Yes."

"And so is Red Sam?"

"He is."

"And the two men killed in the saloon,

the two lying dead there and Pete Dunn were all members of the band?"

"All."

"How many members were there?"

"Before this late epidemic of death struck them, there were thirteen."

"If that was the original number, besides the five dead, yourself and Red Sam, it leaves six more to account for?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"In the camp."

"Bunco, you and sport call out the ones you suspect and let him answer as you name them."

"Bill Wirt," called out Bunco.

"Yes."

"Jerry, the saloon man," suggested the sport.

"No, though Dunn, his pard, was one of the band."

"Buck Adams."

"Yes, sport."

"Tom Hazel."

"Yes, sport."

"Dan Drake."

"Yes, Bunco."

"Lanky Bob."

"Yes, Bunco."

"That is the last one I suspect, Mr. Cody," remarked the sport.

"I can name no one else for a certainty, pard Bill, though there are a hundred men I know in the camp bad enough to belong to the band," Bunco assumed.

"Then I'll name one more, and it's Wallace, the storekeeper."

Both the young sport and Bunco seemed surprised at this assertion of the desperado, for the man spoken of was supposed to be one of the "good citizens."

"You are not giving the name of Wallace because you have a grudge against him, Doc Stone?"

"No, Bunco, I am not. I could add half a dozen if I wanted to, on that score, but I'm on a square trail now. Wallace is one of the leaders, and the worst devil of all."

"All right; we'll put him down, and then consider the whole band all present or accounted for," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, you wish to hear more?"

"Yes, tell what you know, for, as the sport here and Bunco knew the men named we can readily get them when wanted."

"Now, what was the motive of your band in committing the murders which you have perpetrated?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Gold."

"Explain."

"You see, Wallace, the storekeeper, was one of the first men in this part of the country; but when he came, there was one man here before him, and one who had struck it rich."

"Just where this man's gold was, Wallace could not find out, so the miner was safe until the storekeeper, then a gold hunter himself, could discover his secret."

"I next came along with a gang of miners; then others followed, until the camps were established in Devil's Canyon."

"Still Wallace made no headway with the solitary miner whose secret he wanted to ascertain, but who lived far away from here—that is, some dozen miles or more."

"Wallace opened his store, miners went to work, and some gold was found; a few went down the valley to raise cattle, and thus a settlement grew up."

"Wallace got scared at last, for he did not wish too many here, so he decided that all, except those to go in with him in his plot, must be scared off."

"There was but one way to do it, and that was to try and convince all there was no gold here in paying quantity, and to make Devil's Canyon so bad men would get out of it."

"He tried both ways, and finally decided upon a secret band of men-killers."

"The result was the forming of the band of twelve Silent Slayers, for Wallace was to be a silent partner, as it were, known to the captain and his lieutenant only. In that way he could aid those who got into trouble, for no one ever suspected him of being a villain."

"But he was the real leader, and we began the work of the Silent Slayers to scare men out of the camp and leave the field for ourselves alone."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LIVING VICTIM OF THE BAND.

Buffalo Bill and his two comrades listened most attentively to the story of Doc Stone, and when he came to a pause, as though he had said all that he intended to, the scout asked:

"Who was the real leader of this band of murderers?"

"Red Sam."

"And his lieutenant?"

"I was. I could say some one else, but I will tell the truth."

"I can, however, truthfully avow that I never killed one of the twenty-one men the band put out of the way, for Pete Dunn, as you now know, was the victim of some one else."

"Yes, I killed him, for he came here to take my life," added the sport.

"He was ordered to do so, and these two men lying there, and myself, were sent here to-night to kill you; but this is the first time I was detailed for the work, being an officer of the band."

"Excepting Wallace, however, all the living ones have taken life under orders, and were killers on their own account, too, in a number of cases outside of the band."

"Well, we will have to see to them and to this fellow Wallace as well; but, where is the man whose secret mine Wallace wished to find?"

"Oh, I'll tell, now I have started in on it."

"He is a prisoner in his cabin up in the mountains, and ironed hand and foot."

"He seldom left his cabin, only to get provisions, but we went there and made a prisoner of him."

"His mine we could not find, search as we might, but Wallace thought he'd give in some day, and only five of the band know where his cabin is—Wallace, Red Sam and myself, now the other two are dead. It was the plan of one of us who did know to visit him every other day with food, and to see that he was safe."

"I'll tell you, too, that it was my intention to let him know the next time I went that I would set him free and escape with him, if he'd share with me the gold he had hidden away, and when I hinted as much to him the last time I was there, he said we'd talk it over next time."

"But you've got me, and that is why I sold out my secret to you for what I could get, while you will have the money back for rescuing the man, and more, too, if you will demand it, I am pretty sure."

"Do you know anything about this man whose gold find has caused him to meet with such treatment at the hands of Wallace and the members of the band of Silent Slayers?"

"I only know that he is a striking-looking man in appearance, with gray hair and beard, with the step and bearing of a soldier—a very handsome man indeed, and with courtly manners."

"Do you know his name?" asked Buffalo Bill, with more interest than he had yet betrayed.

"No, I do not know his name, but I do know that I saw, on a handsome saddle which he had a name which I sup-

posed to be his engraven upon a silver plate on the horn."

"Do you recall what that name was?"

"Louis Lomax!"

"My God! It is my father! At last I have found him!"

The cry came from the young sport in a voice that thrilled all who heard it, and every eye was upon the youth.

"You father?" echoed Buffalo Bill, eagerly.

"Yes, sir."

"Major Louis Lomax, late of the —th Cavalry, United States Army, and who resigned his commission some years ago?"

"Yes, sir; he is my own father. He resigned his commission because he married a second time, and, believing himself a rich man, went home to enjoy his fortune."

"Instead he found that the friend in whose hands he had left the management of his estate had squandered his last dollar. That was such a terrible blow to him he left home, as he said, to make a fortune by his own hands."

"The lady who was his second wife was my governess when I was younger, and a lovely woman, loving my father very dearly. As a distant relative had left me a handsome legacy, we, my step-mother and myself, decided that I must come West and find my father."

"I had full control of the money left me, had been much the last few years on the Texas ranch of a relative, was young, possessed of great strength and endurance, was a champion athlete, a good rider and dead shot, and so I was glad to start on the search for my father."

"I tracked him out to this country, and I learned from a man whom I befriended that my father had discovered a gold mine, but had been killed by parties to whom he had told his secret."

"Those parties I now know to have been members of the Silent Slayers' band, but as this man died soon after from a wound he had received in a fight, I could learn no more."

"Was this man's name Dick Trench?" asked Doc Stone.

"Yes."

"He was a member of our band."

"And so were two men whom I killed some time ago in Devil's Canyon, for he told me they had murdered my father, and that Red Sam was in it, too."

"Red Sam is in the band, yes; but those two men you killed never were. Dick Trench told you a lie to have you kill them, as they had wronged him and he wished you to square the debt."

"But they were both escaped jailbirds, murderers and as bad as they make 'em, so you did right, especially as they intended to take your life," Doc Stone asserted.

"Well, I have promised you the five thousand, and gladly will I pay it to you, if you will lead me to my father, for I have been here to avenge him and to find his grave, ever since I believed him dead."

"I ought to have struck a higher price."

"Silence! You are fortunate to get off as it is," put in Buffalo Bill; and then turning to the boy sport he continued:

"I was sent here to hunt down this gang of Silent Slayers, and it appears about done, as we now have spotted all of them not yet in hand or who have not been killed."

"I knew your father well, and admired him greatly, for I have served under him. No one will be more pleased at rescuing him from his misfortune than will I."

"As I will be also, pard Bill, for you remember I served under Major Lomax also when we were together."

"Yes, Bunco, and it will be a great surprise for him to see us."

"Now, Doc Stone, we will see to carry-

ing out the plans we have formed, so we will take those bodies to their cabin, let you go to Red Sam's home. You may be sure one of us will be near you to punish with death any treachery upon your part, though, I tell you frankly, I trust you, and it is to your interest to act squarely with us."

"Tomorrow, after we have had a talk with Brad Burns, we will corral those men yet at large, and Red Sam, too, and no suspicion shall fall upon you, Doc Stone, and you can then guide us to the cabin of Major Lomax."

Thus it was arranged between the four in the cabin, and to the satisfaction of each and all.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

There was a stir in Devil's Canyon, when the next morning two more supposed victims of the Silent Slayers were found dead at their cabin.

Brad Burns had called a meeting of the people for that night in the Sports' Delight saloon to decide upon some plan of action, but, meanwhile, he had asked certain men to come to his hotel to there consult with him.

Those asked looked upon it as an honor, and all came at the hour named.

But not any two had the same time set, and as they entered the "private office" they found themselves "covered" by Buffalo Bill with a revolver, while Bunco and the boy sport quickly slipped handcuffs upon them.

The last two to arrive were Red Sam and Wallace, the storekeeper.

Red Sam, who still looked very shaky, wilted when he found that he was entrapped, while Wallace, the "good citizen," seemed deprived of all power of speech or action.

These two were also made secure; but fearing that a rescue would be attempted, should it be known just who had been arrested, and the charge against them, the prisoners were hastened away at dark, under the guidance of Doc Stone, who came out boldly and said he did not care if they did know of his treachery, now that he saw them all secured.

He led the way to the cabin of the unfortunate major, who was found just as Stone had represented.

The meeting of father and son we will not attempt to describe, nor that between Major Lomax and his two scouts, Buffalo Bill and Bunco.

As Major Lomax said he would remain there with his son, to await the return of Buffalo Bill and a force of cavalry, with which to pay a visit to Devil's Canyon, the prisoners were hastened on through the night under guard of the two scouts, accompanied by Doc Stone, who was now very anxious to get well away from Devil's Canyon just as quickly as he could do so.

It was noon the next day, after a very hard ride, when the scouts and their prisoners reached the fort, their horses broken down.

Buffalo Bill held an immediate consultation with the commandant; the prisoners were given into his keeping; Doc Stone was allowed to go free, and the draft given him by the boy sport on an Eastern bank for the sum promised him was safe in his pocket.

From that day he was never heard of again, and it is to be hoped that he led a different life.

With a hundred cavalymen under a gallant captain, Buffalo Bill made the return to Devil's Canyon, and there was a perfect stampede from the place, though a number of hard citizens were corralled to be taken back for trial.

Brad Burns said that the prisoners would have been rescued, he was sure, and as he had had enough of Devil's Canyon, he left, and to-day it is a deserted camp of odious memory.

Bunco had found a snug sum of gold in his claim, and carried it off under guard of the soldiers, going East to enjoy it, and as Mr. Frank Brandon, he is now well off and a very respectable citizen.

Major Lomax also unearthed his gold from its hiding place, and it was for him a new fortune; so he, too, went East to a happy home, accompanied by his son, Louis Lomax, Jr., the whilom boy sport.

As for Buffalo Bill, he remained on the plains to win new laurels in the discharge of the very dangerous and very important duties which the government and army post commandants assigned him.

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